

Speech: Office of Rail and Road's role in improving travel for disabled passengers

Introduction

I welcome the publication of these [3 pieces of important research today](#) (15 November 2017).

I am grateful to the [Office of Rail and Road](#) (ORR) for carrying them out.

And I am grateful to those in the rail industry who assisted in the research.

Many of whom are here today.

I take that as a sign of your commitment to learn from this research and to take action where it's needed.

Because it is through research of this kind that we gain the hard evidence we need to improve services for passengers.

We learn what is being done well.

For instance, we learn how much of a difference can be made by helpful, caring, considerate staff.

And it's right that we recognise those members of rail staff who not only fulfil their formal obligations to disabled passengers, but do so with a smile, with kindness, while allowing passengers to sense that their custom is valued.

And I know that later you'll be hearing some case studies of good service provided by Network Rail, Virgin Trains East Coast, and the work of the [Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee](#).

But we also learn from research of this kind what is not being done so well.

And in this research we do learn rather a lot.

And, again, it's right that we recognise what's not working – and the need to improve.

So I'd like to spend a little more time discussing these areas.

Awareness of support

For me one of the most striking features of the research is that today disabled passengers are not sufficiently aware of their rights to access help.

In fact, over 71% of those eligible to use passenger assist don't know anything about the scheme.

Of those who did know about their right to help, most learned through word of mouth.

Either from helpful rail staff, or from friends and family.

That's not a bad thing in itself.

But word of mouth isn't enough.

After all, if you don't know about help available in the first place, how can you tell others?

Greater awareness must come from better communication by train operating companies themselves.

Reliability of service

The next striking finding of the research is that customer satisfaction is most commonly linked with 3 elements.

The first is whether passengers actually receive the help they request.

Now, I understand that things can go wrong.

But if there's one thing train companies need to be good at, it's getting people to the right place at the right time.

But at the moment, most of the explanations put forward by passengers for assistance failures include:

- staff not arriving to meet them at agreed points
- staff being late
- trains not arriving on time, so staff or equipment to help with alighting are not available as they should be

or stations at either end not being aware of their journey.

These should be easy things to fix.

Getting people to the right place at the right time, and communicating information down the line; this is the bread and butter of any rail company.

But for a variety of reasons, disabled people aren't getting the service they are owed.

Staff attitude

Then there's the second big concern of passengers – the attitude of staff.

I've already said what a positive difference caring, considerate staff can

make.

And the overwhelming majority of staff on the railway are exactly that – often going above and beyond the call of duty to deliver a quality service to vulnerable passengers.

But it is equally true that it can only take one disappointing interaction to rob someone of their confidence in using the transport network.

Passengers have talked about being made to feel an inconvenience.

When a disabled passenger turns up at the station, they are maybe asked “have you booked?” – in what can seem like accusing tones.

Staff may be unable to spot or react properly to hidden disabilities, such as learning difficulties.

Or they may seem sceptical whether help is really needed.

Yet as the prevalence of hidden conditions such as dementia increases in our society, the ability of the railway to respond properly must increase accordingly.

Again, this shouldn't be too difficult to remedy.

A lot of it is about good and thorough staff training.

Of the kind that should be elementary for anyone working in a customer-facing role today.

In my own constituency, I've seen the superb work done by Jane Cole of Blackpool Transport to improve the understanding of bus drivers of the needs of disabled passengers; work informed by Jane's previous role in setting up Virgin's original passenger assist programme.

[Jane is now the government's Champion for Accessible Transport](#) working with the Disabilities Minister, and I hope we can tap into her undoubted expertise.

Facilities

The third major influencing factor – after whether requested help is received, and staff attitudes – is whether facilities are up to scratch.

General accessibility, toilets, lighting, seating, lifts and everything else.

Now I recognise that, of the 3, in some circumstances this can be the most challenging to get right.

That's one legacy of operating the oldest rail network in the world.

Built to Victorian standards.

And I am glad that Network Rail and others have worked hard to find creative ways to fit accessible solutions within historic architecture.

But while getting it right may be challenging, it's still essential.

We need to do more to ensure more toilets on board trains are in service more of the time.

But where they are out of order, we need to fix them, and do it fast.

And until they're fixed, inform passengers in sufficient time before they board.

No one should suffer being caught short while trapped on a train.

Just as no one with vision or spatial awareness challenges should find themselves on a dark platform, illuminated only by a flickering light.

I could go on, but you don't need me to spell out all the possible scenarios in which things can go wrong.

The research is already quite clear on what the issues are, and what needs to be done about them.

Need for enforcement

And all of the above explains why enforcement of these duties is so important, and why the ORR has such an important role to play.

Not only is it the railway's economic regulator, but it is also the passenger's champion when it comes to the handling of complaints, the provision of information during disruption and the provision of services to disabled passengers.

These duties are not in conflict, but rather are complementary.

At the same time, each duty requires a very different mind-set.

I know the ORR has always fought to make sure operators do the right thing for passengers – including holding train operating companies to account for their finances.

And I strongly believe there is no-one better positioned to influence operators, to re-balance the railway in favour of the passenger.

In this role, I see ORR having a visible presence, upholding the legitimate expectations of the fare-paying passenger.

ORR cannot do this alone.

It needs to bring the industry with them on the journey towards higher standards.

But just as justice delayed is justice denied, so is justice in the shadows justice denied.

My inbox and postbag overflows with complaints from those who have not received the level of service they are entitled to when seeking passenger assistance on the railway.

People need to see the strong hand of the ORR guiding these improvements.

ORR holds many enforcement powers that it could be using right now to deliver justice.

As the ORR builds up its evidence base, and negotiates improvements by consensus, I would like to see them wielding these powers.

To become an earnest advocate for passengers who need them the most.

To think creatively about how its consumer-facing role requires an outward-facing advocacy on behalf of disabled passengers.

To seize the opportunity presented by the impending arrival of the Passenger Ombudsman to complement that work by ensuring that the consumer duties it has are explored to their fullest extent.

And by challenging the industry at each and every opportunity.

So as a next step, I would welcome the thoughts of the ORR on how it intends to respond to complaints about levels of accessibility on the railway.

Whether through published league tables, through examples of bad and good practice, or through naming and shaming the very worst.

With creativity, I know that the ORR can truly make a difference.

Conclusions

So, thank you again for this vital work.

It gives us the evidence and the information we need to make things better.

It give us a new opportunity.

So let us be the ones who seize that opportunity.

And make travelling better for everyone.

Thank you.

Press release: Partnership work to repair unexpected voids under M11

A lane closure on the M11 at Girton was lifted yesterday (Thursday 16 November) after Highways England and its partners worked together to repair a series of unexpected voids found beneath the motorway.

The voids, one of which is pictured here, were found in September, with Highways England quickly realising the urgent need to repair it and keep the 40,000 drivers that use the motorway daily moving.

Highways England project manager Karl Brooks said:

Safety is at the heart of everything we do at Highways England, and once we realised the extent of these voids underneath the M11 we moved quickly to get it repaired.

While we want to limit the impact that our work has on people's journeys, these voids did need to be repaired with haste and we needed to ensure that there would be no more surprises. We have worked with our partners to minimise the impact this work has had, and are pleased that we are now able to fully re-open the M11 to traffic at Girton.

The work to fill the voids, which were up to three meters deep in places, saw 1,200 tonnes of filling material used. Interserve and WSP, working on behalf of Highways England, had to dig out the voids to fully realise the extent of them, before being able to repair and resurface them. Drainage repairs, sheet piling installation and environmental works were also done to ensure there would be no recurrence of these voids. Further work will continue on the embankment, including replacing rabbit netting and top soiling, but this will be completed off the road itself, with a hard shoulder closure and temporary 40mph speed limit the only remaining restrictions.

The team also worked closely with their colleagues completing the new £1.5 billion A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon link road, upgrading 21 miles of the A14 to three lanes. This improved A14 will cut journey times by up to 20 minutes, and is on target to open to traffic in 2020. Both teams were able to share road closures to maximise productivity while minimising the impact on road users.

The emergency work to repair the voids is part of a wider £11 million package of work which also includes resurfacing, renewing digital message signs and safety improvements at key locations along the motorway, and on the A120 and A11.

Now completed, the temporary lane closure on the M11 at Girton has been removed, with just a hard shoulder closure and temporary 40mph speed limit

remaining to enable additional work to take place safely away from the carriageway.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[News story: Defence and security technology entrepreneurs invited to apply for Pitch@Palace](#)

As part of our remit to find innovators who can benefit the defence and security of the UK, the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) is pleased to support the Pitch@Palace 9.0 “Data, Intelligence, and The Future of Security” Defence-themed campaign.

Pitch@Palace 9.0 is looking for innovation solutions to enhance the support and protection for the men and women who serve in the UK’s Armed Forces, across the range of challenges. These areas include:

- performance of personnel and training
- harnessing medical and rehabilitation advances
- data capture, processing and analysis
- greater efficiency through the use of automation and autonomy
- personal security, protective clothing and human augmentation
- virtual or augmented reality and simulation
- logistics management

Set up by His Royal Highness the Duke of York in 2014, Pitch@Palace is a charitable trust which aims to guide, help and connect early-stage businesses with potential supporters, including CEOs, influencers, angel investors, mentors and business partners.

The final event will be on the 31 January at St James’s Palace and will be attended by HRH Duke of York, Chief Scientific Adviser and senior MOD representatives/ ministers.

How do I apply?

Applications to the Pitch@Palace Series 9.0 should be made through the [Pitch@Palace website](#). Applications must be made by 17 January 2017.

How it works

Entrepreneurs who apply to the Pitch@Palace are first selected to participate in an On Tour Event, one of three regional heats from which they may get the invitation to attend a Boot Camp.

At Boot Camp the participants will receive support and guidance on how to develop and hone their pitch, as well as support with investment, introductions and strategic guidance.

All of the entrepreneurs selected for Boot Camp are invited to the final event at St. James's Palace, and a selection of these pitch directly to an influential audience from the worlds of entrepreneurship, technology, media and investment.

All of the Pitch@Palace Entrepreneurs, whether selected to pitch at St. James's Palace or not, join the growing alumni network of entrepreneurs and receive ongoing support.

For more information, visit the [Pitch@Palace website](#).

[Press release: Upgrades to the A31 at Ringwood backed](#)

Proposals for a multi-million pound upgrade to improve journeys for the 77,000 drivers who use the A31 at Ringwood in Hampshire each day have won backing in a public consultation, Highways England announced today (Friday 17 November).

91% of people who responded to the non-statutory consultation backed the need for the improvements, which will widen the A31 between the Ringwood and Verwood junctions, increase capacity at Ringwood junction and bring it in line with current safety standards by directing all local traffic via the junction instead of turning directly on to the dual carriageway. Facilities for cyclists and pedestrians will also be improved.

Today's announcement paves the way for work on the upgrade to start in the 2020/21 financial year, subject to statutory processes.

Highways England Project Manager Jens Reinke said:

This section of the A31 is used to make more than 77,000 journeys every day, and we've developed these plans to make real improvements to journeys.

I would like to thank everyone who took part in the consultation. It's great to see that there is such strong backing for improvements to this heavily congested section of the A31 at Ringwood. These plans will lead to the road being safer and supporting access for people getting to Ringwood town centre not only in the car but also on foot or by bike.

We are aware of people's concerns about the closure of the West Street junction to the A31 and have listened to feedback. Around 76% of respondents agreed with the proposal to close the junction for safety reasons, with around 14% preferring for it to stay open. We will now continue to look at the design of the West Street closure into next phase of the project.

The plans include:

- increasing the westbound carriageway of the A31 from two lanes to three between the Ringwood and Verwood junctions
- replacement of the two bridges over the River Avon and Bickerley Millstream to accommodate the westbound third lane
- closing the junction with West Street and the A31 to motorised vehicles
- closing one of the Fish Inn pub's entry/exit points on the A31
- improvements to the existing cycle and footpaths along the A31

A public consultation on the option was held from 23 June to 4 August 2017. Nearly 500 responses were received during this consultation. Information events were held at Ringwood Town Council for the public and stakeholders including local authorities, landowners and businesses, so people could look at the plans and speak to members of the project team.

91% of people who responded to the consultation questionnaire said they agree improvements are needed at Ringwood. 91% also said they are concerned about safety on the A31, with the same number also concerned about congestion or delays along this stretch. 75% of respondents understand the justification for options 2 and 3 being rejected.

A copy of the consultation report and announcement flyer can be found on the [Highways England website](#), where anyone interested in the scheme can also sign up to receive updates.

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Speech: Speech to the Conference of Parties (COP) 23

Bula vinaka! [boo-lah vee-nah-kah, meaning 'warm hello'].

It is such an honour to represent the United Kingdom at COP 23, and I want to thank the Fijian Presidency for its excellent leadership...

... and the people of Germany for their great hospitality.

As our Prime Minister highlighted in New York in September, the Paris Agreement is a brilliant example of effective global cooperation. Every country in the world has now signed the Agreement, and I am proud that the UK is part of this.

It has never been more important to accelerate our momentum. Recent extreme weather events have devastated the lives of many across the world. I would like to extend my deepest sympathy to all those affected and emphasise that we are taking our commitments under the Paris Agreement very seriously and we are taking action.

1. Firstly, for the UK we launched a Clean Growth Strategy for the UK just last month – a critical set of measures to meet our domestic carbon budgets and help our global CO2 reduction process.
2. I was also proud that the UK recently announced plans to phase out unabated coal fired electricity generation by 2025... our intent to end the sale of conventional petrol and diesel cars by 2040... and to establish our Green Finance Taskforce
3. Earlier today the UK, Canada, and over twenty five other parties committed to forming the Powering Past Coal Alliance – a new alliance committed to phasing out unabated coal from power generation.
4. We have also kept our promises in supporting poorer nations to accelerate the transition to a more resilient and low carbon future and play our role in meeting our collective goal of mobilising \$100bn in climate finance per year by 2020.

Last year, we showed international leadership by successfully balancing our climate finance across mitigation and adaptation... and so far we have mobilised £2.2 billion public and £500 million private finance for climate change purposes in developing countries. This has helped over 34 million people deal with the impacts of climate change.

... and I am very proud of the over three hundred million pounds of UK funding announcements at this COP on protecting forests, encouraging private sector investment in sustainable infrastructure, and helping countries finance their existing emissions reduction plans.

Plus we have recently committed to double our 2017 funding to IPCC and make multi-year pledges to be sure that this important institution can continue to play a crucial role in providing independent, rigorous and balanced scientific information on climate change.

The UK also continues to be a global leader in protecting oceans and marine life:

- We are on track to protect 4 million square kilometres of ocean across Overseas Territories by 2020.
- During this COP, we have also announced that the United Kingdom has signed up to the “Because the Oceans” declaration and I encourage others who have not done so, to do the same.

We see pre-2020 action as extremely important – on Tuesday we ratified the Kigali amendment to the Montreal Protocol on phasing down HFCs....

...and I am pleased to say that our Foreign Secretary signed the Doha Amendment yesterday.

We are not resting on our laurels. In the New Year we are looking forward to hosting the Commonwealth summit in London which will help to provide a springboard for future collective action...

We see it as crucial that over the next few years we achieve:

... Agreement on the rules that underpin the Paris Agreement...

... an increase in ambition as technology and innovation makes the transition a win win for the planet and our economy.

... but of course the action that really matters is in the real world where businesses and organisations are taking the signals from these negotiations to transform our future

There is much we can – and must – achieve together.

Thank you to all parties here for working together to make COP23 a huge success.